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House of Commons Debates

FOURTH SESSION—SIXTH PARLIAMENT.

SPEECHES OF HON. EDWARD BLAKE, M.P.,

ON

THE CENSUS.

WEDNESDAY, 26TH MARCH, 1890.

Mr. BLAKE. Quite a number of communications were sent me, after the last census, intimating that if such an understanding as the hon. gentleman has just told us existed at the head office, it did not reach the enumerators in many quarters. I am very glad to hear what the hon. gentleman has said, as he has taken a reasonable view of the matter; but the information I received from many parts of the country is that people who had been more than twenty years away, and were permanently away, were put on the enumerator's list. As the hon. member for Queen's County has said, if a father were asked whether he expected his boy, who had been away some fifteen or twenty years, never to come back, of course the father, in the hope of having his son pay him a visit, would say that certainly he expected him back. The son's name would be put down. That is the report I have received from many parts, and my hon. friend from Quebec (Mr. Langelier) confirms it with regard to that Province. Under these circumstances it would be very important for the hon. gentleman to prescribe a maximum of absence, not within which everybody should be counted—because a man who left yesterday may have gone permanently, and others may leave with the intention of remaining several months and coming back—but after which no man should be counted. It is impossible, from the information I have received, to come to any other conclusion than that, by reason of this system, a laxity, or discretion, was exercised which was grossly misleading. You can put no greater restraint upon the exuberant patriotism of some enumerators, who may be disposed to count a great many more than he ought as likely to come back, than to adopt a check system. I recommended such a system on the occasion of the last census, and I reiterate, with added emphasis, from past experience, the necessity of having the enumerator report every absentee he enters on his list. The mere statement of the total number of absent persons who are counted in the population of any particular district would be a great check. It would enable us to know to what extent the population of the country is supposed to be—not merely

a transitory population, but a population living away from its fixed abode. This would involve no extra trouble, and would not require even another column. You need not mark those who are present at the time; but if you make some particular mark against those who are absent, and give us the figures in each district, that will be a security against laxity and against intentional over-stating, and will of itself form an important element in the formation of a conclusion as to how far the census is really correct.

Mr. BLAKE. The hon. member for Grey speaks, and I can understand his speaking, of a growing desire on the part of Canadians to be returned as belonging to the Canadian nationality, but I was surprised to hear the member for Renfrew (Mr. White) second the observation, that we should find this evidence in the census, because he with his sentiments must have been gratified to feel that we can find the true elements of Canadian nationality and unity in another part of the Statute-book, that is, in the Tariff Act. There it is that, according to his view, we find our common bond, or rather our most uncommon bonds. That is our national unity, and it is in that Act that we find the signs and symbols of our being, at the same time, one and a self-separated and a self-contained people.

Mr. BLAKE. The hon. Minister has stated that no instructions have as yet been issued with respect to the census. I have observed in the public journals a statement that sometime ago a circular was issued to medical men throughout the Dominion with respect to the approaching census, asking them to obtain and transmit to the Department certain information in regard to sanitary matters, hygiene, mortality, and so forth. Is that so? If it is so, will the hon. gentleman bring down the papers?

Mr. CARLING. I shall be glad to bring down the information. The circular was sent out by Mr. Johnson, statistician of the Department, in order to ascertain more correctly the returns as to the number of deaths and the causes of death.

Mr. BLAKE. Having to do with the census?

Mr. CARLING. I suppose it is an enquiry having relation to the census. No steps have been taken in regard to the census; but Mr. Johnson, statistician, has sent a circular to medical men, asking them to furnish him with such information as they possess with respect to deaths and causes of death.

Mr. BLAKE. I must say this: The census is a solemn operation which ought to be entered upon and executed as a whole, and the information sought, and enquiries made, with respect to the census, ought to be authorised and sanctioned with that object and aim. The hon. gentleman says that certain information has been asked by the statistician of the Department, and he supposes it will have some relation to the census. Whatever is going to be done to form a part of that compilation, which is to form our decennial census, ought to be done under Order in Council or departmental regulation, and with direct reference to the census, and under all the sanction and

arrangement necessary for the procuring of that especially accurate information which belongs to such a national transaction.

Mr. BLAKE. There may and will be great difficulty in getting the correct amount of the quantity of butter and cheese manufactured in the different farm houses, but certainly it would be still more difficult to do what the hon. Minister has as just suggested, that is, to give the total for the parish or county, without getting the returns from the houses. You must get the details, in order that you may get the totals. My own impression is, that if it is proposed to obtain an account of the strictly domestic manufacture, it will be found to be very vague and far from approximate. I would suggest, while not dissenting from the notion that this should be attempted, that there should be made a separate account as to the condition of the creameries or factories, for by getting these returns, we will know exactly what is produced. The rest will be to a large extent guess-work.

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